



Commonwealth of Kentucky
Office of the Governor

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Terry Sebastian
502.564.2611
502.229.6130

Jennifer Brislin
502.564.2611
502.753.9766

**Gov. Beshear Signs Executive Order Restoring Right to Vote, Hold Office to
Certain Offenders**

Order excludes persons convicted of violent or sex crimes, bribery or treason

FRANKFORT, Ky. (Nov. 24, 2015) – Governor Steve Beshear today signed an executive order that automatically restores the right to vote and hold public office to certain offenders once all terms of their sentences have been satisfied.

The order excludes persons convicted of violent or sex crimes, bribery or treason.

“The right to vote is one of the most intrinsically American privileges, and thousands of Kentuckians are living, working and paying taxes in the state but are denied this basic right,” Gov. Beshear said. “Once an individual has served his or her time and paid all restitution, society expects them to reintegrate into their communities and become law-abiding and productive citizens. A key part of that transition is the right to vote.”

Under the terms of the order, for felons who are currently incarcerated or under probation or parole supervision, the Department of Corrections (DOC) will verify prior to issuing a restoration of civil rights that there are no pending criminal cases, charges or arrests, or outstanding court-ordered restitution. Individuals meeting those criteria will be granted automatic restoration and a certificate of Restoration of Civil Rights will be issued.

Individuals who have already left the correctional system may pick up a restoration of rights form at any Probation and Parole office, or by contacting the Department of Corrections at 502-782-2248 or online at corrections.ky.gov, and return it to the address listed. DOC will verify whether they meet the criteria set out in the executive order. Offenders who do will have their

voting rights restored “without undue delay” and receive a certificate of Restoration of Civil Rights in the mail.

Offenders who don’t meet the criteria for automatic restoration, including those convicted of federal crimes, may still individually apply to have the Governor restore their civil rights under the current restoration process.

“This approach strikes an effective balance between the need to re-enfranchise thousands of Kentuckians who have paid their debt to society, and the recognition that there are some crimes of such a nature that they require a more deliberative review,” Beshear said.

Under the state’s constitution, persons convicted of a felony are stripped of their rights to vote, hold public office, own a firearm or serve on a jury. Kentucky is one of only four states that does not automatically restore felons’ voting rights upon final discharge of their sentence. An estimated 180,000 Kentuckians have served out their sentence but lack the right to vote.

“Today is a wonderful day for all Kentuckians,” said former state Rep. Jesse Crenshaw, of Lexington. “The steps that Gov. Beshear has taken through this executive order will allow for democracy at its best.”

“Gov. Beshear should be congratulated,” said Sen. Gerald Neal, of Louisville. “Restoring the voting rights of ex-offenders enhances the credibility of the justice system in Kentucky. Kentucky now joins all but a few states in discarding this reactionary, useless restriction.”

“It has long been my belief that once offenders have paid restitution for their crimes, they deserve to have their voting rights restored,” said Sen. Denise Harper Angel, of Louisville. “As someone who has co-sponsored legislation numerous times to restore voting rights, I am very pleased that Gov. Beshear has taken this bold step to move Kentucky forward.”

“This is a major step toward fully re-integrating individuals into society who have paid for their past mistakes,” said Rep. Darryl T. Owens, of Louisville. “I appreciate the leadership of Jesse Crenshaw on this issue and I commend Gov. Beshear for taking this bold action.”

In signing the executive order two weeks before his terms ends, Beshear noted he has consistently supported legislative efforts to permit a constitutional referendum on restoration of rights, and wanted to allow that process to play out. When those efforts failed, he said, he waited under after the November election so as not to politicize the issue during the campaigns.

“The ACLU-KY applauds Gov. Beshear for taking an important step toward breaking down barriers to ballot boxes in Kentucky,” said Michael Aldridge, Kentucky executive director of the ACLU. “We know the Commonwealth’s disenfranchisement policies, some of the harshest in the country, have negatively impacted families and communities, especially those of color, by reducing their collective political voice. Studies have shown that individuals who vote are more likely to give to charity, volunteer, attend school board meetings, serve on juries and are more actively involved in their communities.”

“Today’s order transforms the process for restoring voting rights in Kentucky and makes it accessible to thousands of Kentucky citizens, some of whom have waited many years for this,” said Tomas Lopez, counsel at the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law. “Everyone eligible should act now to take advantage of this important reform.”